

Mr. Kole M. Upton

Chairman
Friant Water Users Authority

Director
Chowchilla Water District

Written Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Water and Power
United States House of Representatives

Oversight Field Hearing

The Economic and Environmental Benefits of New Water Storage
in the San Joaquin Valley

Fresno, California
June 11, 2005

Mr. Kole M. Upton

Chairman, Friant Water Users Authority
Director, Chowchilla Water District

Testimony Before the Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Water and Power
United States House of Representatives

June 11, 2005

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

It is an honor and privilege to appear before this Committee to testify on this issue, one that is of vital importance to the future of the San Joaquin Valley. First, I would like to commend the legislators, Federal, State, and local, for working together on San Joaquin Valley water issues in a productive and bi-partisan manner. Cooperation and consensus among all the people who depend on this water to sustain their livelihoods is the only way we can resolve the difficult challenges ahead.

BACKGROUND

The Friant Division of the Central Valley Project serves approximately 15,000 farmers on one million acres of farmland in parts of Kern, Tulare, Fresno and Madera counties and where I live, Merced County. It sustains underground water supplies relied upon by residents, businesses and industries in the embedded cities within the Friant service area. Those cities now have a population of 1¼ million people. This project along the southern San Joaquin Valley's East Side was specifically designed to correct the overdraft of the underground aquifer that occurred during the 1920's and 30's when residents had only deep wells for a water supply. The aquifer was being depleted and folks had to leave the area when their water ran out. By the time construction began on Friant Dam in 1939, about 50,000 acres of irrigated land had gone out of production because groundwater had been exhausted or was too deep to pump economically. The Friant project essentially brought groundwater supplies into balance with usage, to support and sustain crops and farm production in times and in places in which surface water supplies are not available.

The State of California could not afford to build the Central Valley Project, so the federal government did it. The CVP and Friant Division were specifically authorized by Congress. It provided a welcome opportunity for thousands of small family farmers and the thousands of other people who settled in the nearby communities. Built at a cost of less than \$200 million, the Friant Division annually generates almost \$5 billion in crop receipts and economic activity. This is a government program that worked! The Friant Division today, on an average annual basis, delivers 1.5 million acre-feet of water

depended upon by farmers and those who live and work in several cities, including Fresno, with CVP contracts.

TODAY'S NEED

We are now at a crossroads. Our generation has lived off of the planning, foresight, sweat, and tears of the generation that built the project, operated it in full compliance with Reclamation Law, and paid for it. Here in Friant, we have done everything asked of us by the federal government when our Reclamation project was developed. We have developed farms, irrigation systems, communities, an economy and a way of life. We have continued to make improvements, gaining a standard of water-use efficiency and commitment to conservation perhaps unequalled anywhere else in the world's irrigated agriculture. We have done everything possible to maximize our overall water supply into one of stability and reliability through the conjunctive use of surface water and groundwater that our system's designers intended, and it has all worked magnificently.

Our generation has spent several decades in trying to insure that the environment is protected in a responsible and reasonable manner for the benefit of future generations. In achieving that goal, however, society has empowered an environmental movement that has the power to stop almost any project under the guise of protecting the environment.

Specifically, in the Friant service area, our water supply has been under legal attack for 17 years by some environmental and commercial fishing groups demanding that a self-sustaining salmon fishery be re-established after having been dead for 60 years. Rightly or wrongly, Congress specifically decided to dry up the salmon run in order to provide water to the Friant service area from Friant Dam through the Madera and Friant-Kern canals. Now, environmental groups think they have found a State Law that will enable them to take significant portion of this water. If they win, this area will be devastated.

It needs to be emphasized that we live in a democracy. In the Friant service area, not a single city council person, mayor, assembly member, state senator, or congressional representative supports the position of re-establishing a salmon fishery at the expense of current users. This whole effort is being funded and led by folks in San Francisco and out of California.

What should we do? Build Temperance Flat Dam. A new dam at that site will provide much additional storage and better flood control. All acknowledge that Friant Dam is too small for the watershed. A new dam would also provide immense benefits for the environment. It would make some sort of river restoration feasible without having to have the current beneficial users of this water to suffer. Friant Dam has only about 380,000 acre-feet of usable storage. Temperance Flat could provide up to 2,000,000 acre-feet.

What are the obstacles? It is those within the environmental movement that reject new in-stream storage out of hand. Unfortunately, reasonable environmentalists stay silent during the discussion. The environmental movement has been granted immense power by this society. With power comes responsibility. It is time the leaders of the environmental movement acted in a manner that will allow us to take the necessary steps to assure our future generations have adequate and affordable water.

CONCLUSION

My recommendation is that our Valley delegation submit a bi-partisan bill to put the building of Temperance Flat on a 'fast track'. Frankly, the CalFed process does not appear to be a vehicle in which anything significant can be accomplished quickly. This area cannot afford to wait any longer. The time for action is now.

Our Valley delegation is as strong as we have seen it in many years, with several members being in key leadership positions. If not now, when?